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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Thursday, January 18,



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Our technology columnist answers
readers' questions — **MOSSBERG'S MAIL**

Cendant's ex-chairman is sentenced to
Prison: The Index to People — **WHO'S NEW**

Vista: Worthy, Largely Unexciting

**XP Successor Doesn't Break
New Ground on Ease of Use,
But It's Best Windows Yet**

A NEW version of Microsoft Windows, the world's most popular and important computer operating system, will finally arrive for consumers on Jan. 30. It has taken the giant software maker more than five years to replace Windows XP with this new version, called Windows Vista—an eternity by computer-industry reckoning. Many of the boldest plans for Vista were discarded in that lengthy process, and what's left is a worthy, but largely unexciting, product.

Vista is much prettier than previous versions of Windows. Its icons look better, windows have translucent borders, and items in the taskbar and in folders can display little previews of what they contain. Security is supposedly vastly better; there are some new free, included programs; and fast, universal search is now built in. There are hundreds of other, smaller, improvements and additions throughout the system, including parental controls and even a slicker version of Solitaire.

After months of testing Vista on multiple computers, new and old, I believe it is the best version of Windows that Microsoft has produced. However, while navigation has been improved, Vista isn't a breakthrough in ease of use. Overall, it works pretty much the same way as Windows XP. Windows hasn't been given nearly as radical an overhaul as Microsoft just

applied to its other big product, Office.

PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY



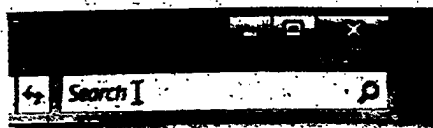
By Walter S.
Mossberg

Nearly all of the major, visible new features in Vista are already available in Apple's operating system, called Mac OS X, which came out in 2001 and received its last major upgrade in 2005. And Apple is about to leap ahead again with a new version of OS X, called Leopard, due this spring.

There are some big downsides to this new version of Windows. To get the full benefits of Vista, especially the new look and user interface, which is called Aero, you will need a hefty new computer, or a hefty one that you purchased fairly recently. The vast majority of existing Windows PCs won't be able to use all of Vista's features without major hardware upgrades. They will be able to run only a stripped-down version, and even then may run very slowly.

In fact, in my tests, some elements of Vista could be maddeningly slow even on new, well-configured computers.

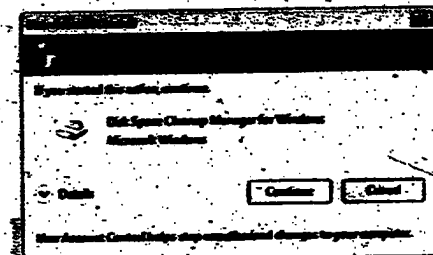
Also, despite Vista's claimed security improvements, you will still have to run, and keep updating, security programs, which can be annoying and burdensome. Microsoft has thrown in one such program free, but you will have to buy at least one more. That means that, while



Vista has built-in, universal, rapid search, which can find any term deep inside documents, email and other types of files. You can also save searches as virtual folders, which will keep collecting files that meet your search criteria.



Vista's Flip 3D feature (above) lets you scroll through images of currently running programs. The Windows Photo Gallery (left) is for organizing and editing photos. Sidebar (right) contains miniapplications.



A new security feature in Vista (left) called User Account Control asks that you give permission for potentially dangerous changes to your PC, such as installing new software.

Vista has eased some of the burden on users imposed by the Windows security crisis, it will still force you to spend more time managing the computer than I believe people should have to devote.

Here's a quick guide to the highlights of the new operating system.

Versions and Upgrading

Vista comes in six versions, two of which are primarily aimed at consumers. One, called Home Premium, is the one most consumers will want. It contains the full Aero interface, and it includes the functionality of Windows Media Center and Windows 'Tablet' edition, which have been discontinued as separate products. Home Premium costs \$229, or \$159 if you are upgrading from an earlier version of

Windows. It will come preloaded on most midrange and some high-end consumer PCs.

The other main consumer edition of Vista is the stripped-down version, called Home Basic. It includes the improved security and search but leaves out the new Aero interface and the Media Center and Tablet functions. It will be preloaded on low-price PCs. Home Basic will cost \$199, or \$100 for upgraders.

A third version, called Ultimate, will wrap up everything in Home Premium with some additional features from the business versions of Vista. This is for power users, and it is likely to be preloaded on high-end PCs. But some regular users may need Vista Ultimate if their compa-

Please turn to page B4

Tech Start-Ups Money to Burn But Choose Th

By FUI-WING TAI
AND REBECCA BUCKMAN

WHEN SILICON VALLEY ENTREPRENEUR Nguyen launched two tech companies in the late 1990s dot-com era—Seven Networks and Onebox—the through about \$2 million a month. I hired hundreds of people and spent marketing and sales. That's not how is using cash at his newest start-up site Lala.com.

Since getting \$9 million in venture funding in mid-2005, Lala Med stashed 60% of that money in the Nguyen has hired just 20 people for whom are engineers. The Palo Alto company has spent little on marketing and sales. Its staff built some of the desks they use in the office and sometimes plays janitor in order to scrimp. Lala is currently burning through about \$200,000 a month, says Mr. Nguyen.

"When you got venture-capital money previously, many people thought you immediately needed to spend it by hiring 40 or 50 people," says Mr. Nguyen. "Now we view the money as just an asset and date license to spend."

Stories like Mr. Nguyen's have become an element of a new tech ethos that has taken hold in the dot-com bubble. While Silicon Valley and other entrepreneurs once again proliferating, they have a fierce approach to spending their cash.

Past excesses were exemplified such as online pet store Pets.com burned through \$100 million in 2000—including spending an estimated \$10 million on advertising in waste blasts. Those dot-coms typically staffed up dozens of new recruits, and were known for launch parties and other expensive

Today's start-ups, by contrast, are one or two new staffers a month, and find inexpensive ways to attract such as limited Internet advertising: once on word of mouth through Web site. Start-ups' "burn rates"—the pace for how much cash a young company revenues and no profits is going month—are noticeably lower than. Indeed, while tech start-ups are funding these days—an average of each time, down from \$11 million in are making the money last longer. research firm VentureOne, tech start-ups now survive an average on a single round of funding before raise more money, up from just \$200,000. (VentureOne is a unit of Dow publisher of this newspaper.)

All of this suggests that the current may play out differently than the dot-com era.

Please turn to

TECHNOLOGY JOURNAL

Vista: Worthy, Unexciting

Continued from page B1
 nies have particular network configurations that make it impossible to connect to the company network from home with Home Basic or Home Premium. Vista Ultimate will cost \$399, or \$259 as an upgrade.

Even if you buy the Home Premium or Ultimate editions, Vista will revert to the Basic features if it detects that your machine is too wimpy to run the new user interface.

For most users who want Vista, I strongly recommend buying a new PC with the new operating system preloaded. I wouldn't even consider trying to upgrade a computer older than 18 months, and even some of them may be unsuitable candidates. Microsoft offers a free, downloadable Upgrade Advisor program that can tell you how ready your XP machine is. It's available at: microsoft.com/windows-vista/getready/upgradeadvisor.

If you bought a PC in the past few months, and it had a "Vista Capable" sticker on it, it should be able to run at least Home Basic. If it was labeled "Premium Ready," it should be able to handle Premium and probably Ultimate.

Microsoft says that Home Basic can run on a PC with half a gigabyte of memory and that Premium and Ultimate will work on a PC with one gigabyte of memory. I strongly advise doubling those numbers. To get all the features of Vista, you should have two gigabytes of memory, far more than most people own.

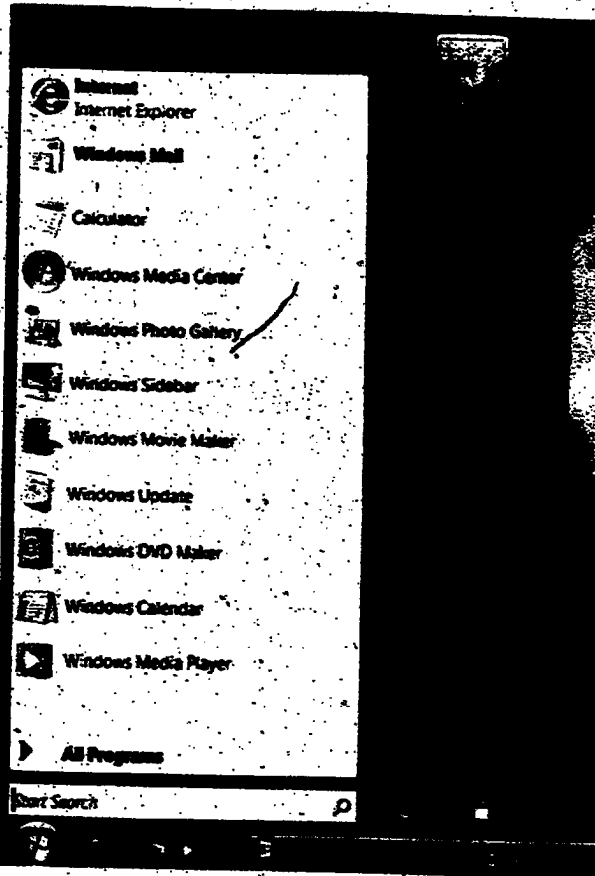
Even more important is your graphics card, a component most people know little about. Home Basic can run on almost any graphics system. But Premium and Ultimate will need a powerful, modern graphics system to run well.

Performance

I tested Vista on three computers. On a new, top-of-the-line Hewlett-Packard laptop, with Vista preinstalled, it worked smoothly and quickly. It was a pleasure.

On a three-year-old H-P desktop, a Vista upgrade installed itself fine. But even though this computer had a full gigabyte of memory and what was once a high-end graphics card, Vista Ultimate reverted to the Basic user interface. And even then, it ran so slowly and unsteadily as to make the PC essentially unusable.

The third machine was a new, small Dell XPS M1210 laptop. In



Like the rest of Vista, the Start Menu has a prettier, more refined look.

Vista also has built-in parental controls so you can restrict what a child can do on the computer. This is also already on the Macintosh, though the Vista controls are more elaborate.

Microsoft includes a free anti-spyware program in Vista, called Windows Defender. But PC Magazine regards it as inferior to paid programs like Spy Sweeper and Spy Doctor. So you may want to buy one of these. You should also buy an antivirus program, which isn't included.

User Interface

The new Aero interface is lovely, and it makes using a PC more pleasant and efficient. It apes some elements on the Macintosh but retains a distinct look and feel. Icons of folders look three dimensional, and they pop. Most file icons are thumbnails that show a tiny preview of the underlying document.

The old hourglass icon that appeared during delays has been replaced by a gleaming, spinning blue circle. The cutesy names for standard folders, like "My Pictures" have been changed to "Pictures".

Search

Like the Mac, Windows now has rapid, universal, built-in search, a very welcome thing. The main search box is contained at the bottom of the Start menu, and it works well. Other search boxes appear in every open window.

You can also save searches as virtual folders, which will keep collecting files that meet your search criteria. This is another feature introduced earlier by Apple.

Built-In Programs

The Outlook Express email program has been given a facelift and renamed Windows Mail. But it's pretty much the same, except for a new junk-mail filter. The Windows Address Book has been renamed Windows Contacts and, oddly, turned into a sort of file folder.

The latest version of the Internet Explorer Web browser, with tabbed browsing, is included, though it's also available for Windows XP.

As on the Mac, Windows now has a nice, centralized Calendar program. And there's a new photo

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The third machine was a new, small Dell XPS M1210 laptop. In general, Vista ran smoothly and well on this Dell, but some operations were annoyingly slow, including creating a new message in the built-in Windows Mail program. This surprised me, because the Dell had two gigabytes of memory and a fast processor.

Security

Microsoft says Vista is much more secure than any other operating system. But this is hard to prove, especially at the beginning of its life, when few hackers and malefactors have access to it. One visible security feature asks for your permission before you do potentially dangerous tasks, like installing new software. This is a good thing, and it's been on the Macintosh for years. But unlike the Mac version, the Vista version of this permission feature doesn't necessarily require you to type in a password, so a stranger or a child using your PC could grant permission for something you yourself might not allow.

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As on the Mac, you can now drag favorite folders into a list at the left of open windows, so it's easy to get to them.

A new feature called Flip 3D shows a 3D view of all the programs you're running and lets you scroll through them. It's like the Mac's excellent Exposé feature, though not quite as handy.

Another new feature, called the Sidebar, is a vertical strip at the side of the screen that can contain tiny programs, called Gadgets, displaying things like favorite photos, news headlines, stock prices and the weather. Once again, this is awfully similar to a Macintosh feature called Dashboard, which displays tiny programs called Widgets.

Some familiar Windows features have new names. The old Display control panel, where you chose screen savers and desktop pictures, is now called Personalization. The Add or Remove Programs control panel is now called Programs and Features.

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As on the Mac, Windows now has a nice, centralized Calendar program. And there's a new photo-organizing program, Windows Photo Gallery, but it's inferior to Apple's iPhoto because it doesn't allow you to create photo books, or add music to slide shows. There's also a pretty rudimentary DVD-burning program.

The familiar WordPad program can no longer open Microsoft Word files (ironically, Apple's free built-in word processor does).

Gradually, all Windows computers will be Vista computers, and that's a good thing, if only for security reasons. But you may want to keep your older Windows XP box around awhile longer, until you can afford new hardware that can handle Vista.

Email me at mossberg@wsj.com.

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Technology columnist
Walter S. Mossberg
answers readers' questions

Q: Will the new Apple iPhone be able to open and edit Microsoft Word documents? Will it be able to synchronize calendar and contact entries with Microsoft Outlook?

way to avoid bankrupting myself by buying the same software on both systems?

A: Sure. Just use the machines for different purposes, and keep each stocked only with the software for

Web page as an Adobe PDF file, readable by any computer.

On the other hand, Windows offers many more niche or specialty programs, such as small-business software, and programs such as WordPerfect and Microsoft Access that some businesses and professional firms rely upon. And Windows kills the Mac on games.

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Q. & A.

Advance Planning for Windows Vista

By J.D. BIERSDORFER
Published: April 20, 2006

Q. I want to buy a laptop. Should I wait until the new version of Windows comes out?

A. The consumer release of Microsoft's new operating system, Windows Vista, has been delayed until early next year, so you would be waiting quite a while to buy a computer with the system already in place. If you don't want to wait, you can look for a new computer that has been qualified as "Windows Vista Capable," which means that it has the minimum hardware components necessary to run the most basic version of Windows Vista.

Like Windows XP, though, the new operating system will be available in several versions for business and home users, and each version may have slightly different requirements. Some higher-end versions of Vista may require a more robust processor and graphics card than the most basic edition needs. Microsoft has some general guidelines that outline good, better and best hardware to use with a future Vista system at www.microsoft.com/technet/windowsvista/evaluate/hardware/vistarp.msp.

Finding a Home for Your Thoughts

Q. Do you have to have your own Web site to start a blog?

A. With free or inexpensive sites around the Web, you can start your own Web log, or blog, without having to set up your own Web site or learning how to write Web-page code. Sites like Blogger (www.blogger.com), Xanga (www.xanga.com) and LiveJournal (www.livejournal.com) offer free basic accounts, and once you set one up and log in, you can blog away on their servers.

These types of sites offer preformatted templates and simple software for writing your blog's text and adding pictures. You may not have full control over the look of your blog, and some sites stick banner advertisements on the pages of free account holders, but you do get a free forum to express your views.

Setting up a free blog account is not unlike signing up for a free Web-based e-mail account. You supply a user name and password — and then use those later to log into the main site when you want to update your blog. If you decide you want a more personal look or do not want somebody else's advertisements on your blog page, check to see if your service offers upgraded paid accounts that eliminate the ads in exchange for a monthly or annual fee.

If you do have your own Web site or a certain amount of server space from your Internet provider to use for a Web site, you can put your blog there instead. You can use programs like Movable Type (www.sixapart.com/movabletype) and WordPress (www.wordpress.org) to compose and post updates to your Web log.

Making Room for the Movies

Q. How much hard drive space do you need available to use a movie download service? Are the files as big as those on a DVD?

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A. If you have a broadband connection and some spare hard drive space on your computer, movie download services can save you a trip to the neighborhood video store. Instead of renting a physical DVD, you download digital copies of mainstream Hollywood movies over the Internet to your PC.

A standard DVD can hold 4.7 gigabytes of data on a single-layer disc, but you don't need that much spare room on your hard drive to rent or buy a full-length film from a movie-download service. The size of the downloaded file may vary, but to be on the safe side, you should make sure your hard drive has at least two gigabytes of free space available to accommodate each movie.

CinemaNow (www.cinemanow.com) and Movielink (www.movielink.com) "rent" films over the Internet by letting you download and watch movie files that are specially coded to expire or become disabled after your rental period is up. You're not stuck watching the movie files on your computer monitor; you can connect the PC to your TV with audio-video cables and watch your films on the big screen.

Both services work only with Windows, and each has specific system requirements listed on its site. For about the price of a DVD, you can also buy nonexpiring versions of many movies from either site.

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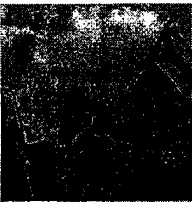

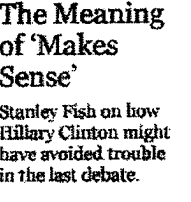

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PCWORLD

No Vista, but 'Vista Capable' Stickers Instead

Microsoft hopes marketing program may ease Vista delay fallout.

Elizabeth Montalbano, IDG News Service

Friday, March 31, 2006 02:00 PM PST

SAN FRANCISCO — Even though Windows Vista won't be available until next year, Microsoft will work with hardware partners to prepare customers for its release. Starting next month, PCs with stickers saying "Windows Vista Capable" will be in stores, letting customers know what hardware can be upgraded to that operating system once it is available, the company said today.

Microsoft and industry partners co-developed what the company calls the Windows Vista Capable PC program to identify machines that currently run Windows XP but have the requirements to upgrade to Vista. Microsoft announced earlier this month that consumer versions of Vista wouldn't be ready until January.

To receive a sticker, the PCs must pass certification requirements for the Designed for Windows XP logo. They also must meet hardware criteria that make them capable of performing well if running Windows Vista, Microsoft said. Those requirements are a modern CPU, at least 512MB of memory, and a DirectX 9-class graphics processor.

Ready or Really Able?

At a minimum, the requirements met by Windows Vista Capable PCs will allow customers to run Windows Vista Home Basic, according to Microsoft. However, they do not represent the minimum hardware requirements for higher-end versions of Vista, requirements Microsoft says it will provide in the future as the program expands.

Joe Wilcox, analyst with Jupiter Research, stresses the importance for customers of the distinction between PCs "capable" of running Vista and those that are actually "ready" to do so.

"A system that will run Windows Vista may not be capable of using all of its features," he points out. For example, a machine branded "Windows Vista Capable" that is a high-end Media Center PC with superior graphics capabilities will be ready for even the most feature-intensive versions of Vista, Wilcox explains. But if it's a low-cost PC and it has a "Capable" sticker on it, "it will probably run the features of Home Basic but not anything else," he warns.

Wilcox adds that the Windows Vista Capable program was developed before Microsoft announced Vista's delay, and that the company may have wanted to put off the program once the delay was announced, but could not because the program already was in motion, with certified PCs ready to go to the stores.

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Computer Shopper

September 1, 2006

SECTION: Pg. 80(6) Vol. 26 No. 9 ISSN: 0886-0556

ACC-NO: 150907983

LENGTH: 4141 words

HEADLINE: Vista unveiled: a behind-the-scenes look at Microsoft's upcoming OS;
Microsoft Windows Vista

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BODY:

YOU DON'T NEED IT. YOU DO WANT IT. YOU WILL HAVE IT.

That's my take on Microsoft's forthcoming Windows Vista operating system, after exploring the first public beta software (Beta 2, build5384) for about a month.

Most folks who currently use Windows XP and keep up with the latest security patches and updates will have no critical reason to upgrade. In fact, unless you're a power user with a high-end configuration and actually enjoy tweaking, searching for drivers, and troubleshooting incompatibilities, wouldn't recommend an upgrade. If you bought your PC in the past year or two, stick with XP until your hardware really needs to be replaced, then buy a new PC with Vista preinstalled.

Of course, Vista does offer some enticements to upgrade. Most compelling is the new Search function, which is well-integrated across the operating system and easy to use, though if you've already installed a third-party desktop search tool such as Google Desktop, you don't absolutely need it.

What will likely inspire the most Vista-envy--but is arguably least useful--is the OS's slick new "visual experience," including its Aero 3D effects. While Aero's pretty translucent windows, live Taskbar thumbnails, and turbocharged Alt+Tab task-switching feature (called Windows Flip) are all fun and do enhance productivity somewhat, they aren't must-have features. And that's a good thing, because many Vista users won't even have access to these capabilities--Vista scales back the visual experience depending on your hardware specs and which version of the OS you are running. (See the chart "What You Need to Run Vista.")

Nevertheless, chances are you'll be running Windows Vista in the not-too-distant future. PC vendors are champing at the bit to start selling systems with Vista preinstalled, so if Vista is not on your next Windows PC, it will

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be on the one after that. Though the minimum hardware requirements are relatively modest, to get the best Vista experience, you'll need a dual-core processor, lots of RAM, and a high-end graphics processor with ample memory. And what PC vendor wouldn't want to sell you that? At press time, Microsoft was still standing by a projected January 2007 date for the much-delayed release, but also just announced another slight delay in the launch of Office 2007. With the new Office originally scheduled to coincide with the Vista launch, Vista may well be delayed even further.

Still, whenever Vista arrives, it will have a lot in store for you, whether you plan to upgrade an existing system or wait to buy a new Vista-based PC. Even though the OS isn't a must-have upgrade for most XP users, after getting used to its features and conveniences, I certainly miss them now that I've switched back to plain old XP. If my month living with Beta 2 is any indication, you can look forward to better access to your stuff, better performance, better security, and, simply, just more fun.

BETTER ACCESS

One of the first things you'll notice after booting up Vista (apart from the slicker graphics) is the streamlined Start menu. Instead of the cascading XP version that ends up covering so much of the desktop, the new Start menu keeps everything in the left pane, letting you scroll through items. Even better is the Search field in the lower left corner of the Start menu, which lets you quickly find an application or file by typing in a keyword. Type "Word," for example, and WordPad pops up ready to launch (and in my case Microsoft Word, as well, because I have the Office 2007 beta installed). Typing a URL or harddrive path into the Search field immediately takes you to that destination, launching Internet Explorer or Windows Explorer automatically.

In fact, one of Vista's best improvements is the integration of Search practically everywhere, making it easier to use and more useful than third-party desktop-search tools (and much more like the Spotlight search capability that Mac users have enjoyed for more than a year now). You'll find instant Search fields not only on the Start menu, but also on most windows across the OS. Because the search is context-sensitive, searching in the Control Panel window, for example, will bring up tasks associated with the Control Panel. Opening the Search Pane in the right column of the Start menu gives you access to more-detailed search options, allowing you to choose specific locations or show results for specific content types such as e-mail, documents, pictures, and music. You can filter search results by multiple criteria, such as keyword or author, since Vista searches not only filenames but also the contents of every file, metadata saved with files (including tags you can add yourself), and even e-mail attachments. You can also save a specific search so you can easily search again using those particular filters. Plus, Vista intelligently examines your processor usage before indexing rather than simply waiting for keyboard or mouse inactivity, so you won't notice the aggravating slowdowns that you get with a tool like Google Desktop.

While Search makes locating your data easier, Vista's new Explorer makes it similarly simple to navigate your drives and directories. It's much more visual, with live thumbnail icons that show little previews of your documents, photos, PowerPoint slides, and more as you explore. The drop-down View menu includes a slider bar to scale the size of the icon, and you can even glimpse previews of documents inside folders (though even at the largest icon size, they're really more gee-whiz than truly useful). A preview pane at the bottom of the screen shows a high-resolution live thumbnail of the selected file along with detailed metadata. You can also easily edit that information with a context-sensitive tool that changes options depending on what type of file you're viewing.

Perhaps my favorite new Explorer feature is the directory "breadcrumb" bar, which lets you see at a glance where the subdirectory you're viewing resides. Even better, you can click on individual folders in the directory path to quickly navigate back through the directory hierarchy. Back and forward buttons let you move around easily, and because Vista incorporates the Explorer interface consistently across the operating system, you have a similar experience whether you're browsing documents and photos or looking at Control

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Panel options.

BETTER PERFORMANCE

Evaluating Vista's performance is a tricky proposition. That's because you need a pretty powerful system to take advantage of all the OS has to offer, and most people who use Vista will probably upgrade their hardware at the same time and therefore see performance gains anyway. Still, after running Beta 2 on a \$1,299 Asus A6Jc notebook that meets the higher-tier Windows Vista Premium Ready hardware requirements--thanks to its 1.83GHz Intel Core Duo T2400 processor, 1GB of RAM, and nVidia GeForce Go 7300 graphics with 128MB of dedicated memory--I learned that I'll want a more powerful PC when I upgrade to Vista permanently. Though it's certainly unfair to judge performance using prerelease software (particularly since I had to hack my graphics driver before I could get Vista to recognize it in the first place), it's safe to assume minimum hardware requirements are just that--the minimum.

Still, Vista includes several performance enhancements to make your everyday tasks easier and make you more productive more quickly. SuperFetch, for example, is a new intelligent memory-management technology that allows your applications and files to load much faster than they do in XP. SuperFetch precaches the applications and files you use most often so that they'll load faster, and optimizes them based on usage patterns over time. So the longer you use Vista, the better it'll know your habits and the better it can manage memory. The OS even analyzes what times you use different applications, precaching apps you tend to use on weekdays, for example, but leaving them out of the mix on weekends. Similarly, Low Priority Input/Output allows your applications to get higher resource priority (and, as a result, less-impaired performance) than background tasks such as antivirus scans or disk defragmentation.

ReadyBoost, another cool technology, allows you to take advantage of external flash memory to improve system performance. Don't have enough RAM to load that enormous file? Plug in a USB 2.0 thumb drive, and ReadyBoost will let you combine the available flash memory with system memory. Like a RAM upgrade, but much easier, ReadyBoost can improve your PC's overall performance by offloading the SuperFetch cache, for instance.

Another way Vista can improve your day-to-day performance is by using its ReadyDrive technology to take advantage of new hybrid hard drives, which combine a hard drive with up to 1GB of built-in flash memory. Because flash memory can retrieve data faster and consumes less power than a standard hard drive, ReadyDrive lets you boot up and resume from hibernate mode faster, and extends battery life in notebooks. In fact, Microsoft plans to make hybrid hard drives with ReadyDrive technology a requirement for mobile systems to qualify for the Vista Premium logo in the second quarter of 2007.

Even without a hybrid hard drive, however, Vista starts up and shuts down faster than XP, which is one of my favorite aspects of the new OS. Vista's new Sleep mode saves your current computing session in memory while instantaneously putting the computer in a low-power state, so you can immediately shut down with a click of a button and get back up and running within seconds. Sleep combines XP's Standby and Hibernate modes by simultaneously saving your current session to RAM and the hard drive. I've always envied Mac users for Apple's instant sleep and resume features, and Vista's equivalent seems to work equally well. On a notebook, you can go into Sleep mode by pressing the power button or just closing the screen.

Finally, Vista monitors your system's performance, scaling features to the capabilities of your hardware and reporting back on the causes of system slowdowns, enabling you to make changes to improve performance. Before Vista runs on a new PC, it rates the performance of the system's hardware, automatically adapting itself to the machine's capabilities. For example, if your graphics subsystem isn't powerful enough, Vista disables the Aero 3D graphics. Using the Control Panel's Performance Rating and Tools, you can examine performance details about your processor, memory, and other hardware; discover specific performance issues; and access tools that will help you address them.

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BETTER SECURITY

Security is one of those things that you might like to ignore, but you shouldn't. Microsoft has emphasized security improvements in Vista, building in virus and spyware killers, improving firewall features, and generally reducing the risk of malware.

The new Windows Defender tool works like most third-party security utilities, alerting you when an unknown application attempts to install itself or change important Windows settings, and allowing you to schedule scans or manually scan your computer for harmful software. Defender works seamlessly with Windows Update to automatically install new software definitions as they are updated and released. Additionally, Microsoft has built an online community called SpyNet that lets you find out how other people have responded to software that hasn't been classified for risks, to help you decide how you should respond to potential threats.

Another way Vista improves security is to limit privileges to change settings on your PC, even if you're logged on as an administrator. Most XP users run as administrators by default, since most people don't bother to create standard user accounts to run in standard user mode (and because so many applications require administrator privileges to install). Under Vista, even administrators run in standard user mode by default, and standard users are given permissions to run more tasks, which makes running in standard mode more usable. Administrators are able to elevate their privileges when necessary (for instance, when executing a task that requires administrator rights). Additionally, if you're running in standard user mode, you don't have to log out and log back in as administrator as you do in XP; Vista allows standard users to just enter an administrator's password to access restricted tasks. In theory, this will make Vista safer, but in practice, it gets a bit annoying having to respond to pop-up windows requesting permission whenever you start up Device Manager, for example.

MORE FUN!

Though Microsoft touts the Aero graphical interface as a productivity enhancer, in reality, it's more fun than useful. But not everyone gets to join the party. If you're running Home Basic, or you don't have a powerful enough graphics card (read: an ATI Radeon 9500 or better, or nVidia GeForce FX family or better), you won't be able to run Aero.

For the lucky ones, Aero offers translucent window effects, as well as live thumbnails of running applications when your cursor hovers over a minimized application on your Taskbar or when you hit Alt+Tab to activate Windows Flip, the new and improved task-switching feature. Pressing the Windows key and Tab activates Windows Flip 3D, which lets you flip through live windows in a 3D stack. Previewing applications live (such as running videos, for example) is totally cool when you first try it--Flip 3D was one of the features that I looked forward to most when I first installed Beta 2. But after using Flip in real life for a month, I realized that the thumbnails of many applications are too small to be truly useful at a glance. Even Flip 3D, with its much larger previews, only makes it marginally faster to recognize which window you're looking for. As for the translucent windows, also known as Aero Glass, Microsoft says they help you focus on information; really, they're just pretty.

Other fun stuff in Vista is much more useful, though like Search and Sleep, it sometimes feels like a game of catch-up with the Mac (not necessarily a bad thing). Take the new Sidebar and Gadgets, for example. The transparent Sidebar running along the right or left side of your desktop lets you organize and display Gadgets, which are miniature desktop applications that provide quick access to frequently used functions or frequently updated information--essentially, widgets by another name. Microsoft may be a little late to the widget game (and Apple certainly wasn't the first) but it's still fun--and useful--to add photo slide shows, customizable clock faces, and RSS feeds, to name a few of the included Gadgets. And though not many are available yet, an online gallery lets you find other Gadgets or, if you're a developer, the tools to create your own.

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For fun with your music, Vista includes Windows Media Player 11, which improves upon previous versions by making it easier to organize, rip, burn, and synchronize large music collections. As with the rest of Vista, Media Player includes a fast and effective search function; it also lets you organize and view your music in multiple ways. In addition to the usual artist, album, song, and genre, for example, you can also view by contributing artist, parental ratings, your own ratings, and more. Plus, with a new emphasis on album art, browsing through your music collection is now a much more visual and intuitive task. For easy access to new music, Media Player integrates with MTV's Urge music service, making the purchase of new music as easy as, say, buying a song from iTunes.

Media Player also lets you view and organize your videos and photos, but the better tool to use for photos is the new Photo Gallery. Sticking with Vista's theme of easy search and organization, Photo Gallery makes it a breeze to find and manage digital photos, with a decidedly iPhoto-esque interface. You can view high-resolution thumbnails that can be easily resized using a slider control (though not to full-screen size as with iPhoto), or play slide shows with a "Ken Burns"-style panning-and-zooming effect. You can add tags to make your photos easier to find and perform basic editing of your photos within the application. And you can easily drag photos into Windows Movie Maker to create home movies using your pictures. Of course, Google's free Picasa photo-management tool has many of the same features (Ken Burns is absent, though) and is arguably better than both Photo Gallery and iPhoto. But that's a story for another day.

TOP 5 VISTA FEATURES

When Beta 2 of Vista was released in May, I listed these favorite Vista features on Computer Shopper's ShopTalk blog (

www.computershoppermag.com/shoptalk):

Windows Flip, Meeting Space, SideShow, and performance enhancers SuperFetch, ReadyBoost, and ReadyDrive. After a month of living with Beta 2, though, I've revised my list of faves.

1 **EXPLORER BREADCRUMBS** Vista offers lots of features with a high gee-whiz factor that catch your eye at first, such as the live file previews in the new Explorer (or, if you can run Aero, the live thumbnails of currently running apps on the Taskbar). But I've found Vista's breadcrumb narration to be much more useful--it lets me click quickly through subdirectory hierarchies to find what I need.

2 **SEARCH ON THE START MENU** in retrospect, this should have been on my original list. I love being able to click on the Start menu and easily find files and launch applications. I can go to the search field and type something like "C:/Users/Janice/ Pictures" or "

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" and go right there without launching Explorer or IE. The feature works wonders for finding functions that otherwise take tons of clicking to uncover. Typing in "Device Manager" drops you right where you want to be rather than having to navigate to the Control Panel and look for the Device Manager icon.

3 **SLEEP MODE** While SuperFetch and ReadyBoost are still pretty cool, my favorite performance improvement is much less glamorous. I've long envied Macs and their time-saving instant on/off ability, and with Vista, Windows has finally caught up. By combining XP's Standby and Hibernate modes into a single, instant-off state, you can power up or down in just seconds.

4 **MEETING SPACE** It was on my original list, and I still love this collaboration tool, which lets you create an ad hoc wireless connection with nearby Vista users even without a Wi-Fi network. You can share programs and jointly edit documents with up to 10 other users (although Vista Home Basic users only get to view documents). In Beta 2, it's still called Windows Collaboration, but Microsoft plans to rename the tool Meeting Space for launch.

5 **GUIDED HELP** Call me lazy, but I love Vista's interactive Guided Help tool. Just over 30 help topics in Vista include the tool, which provides a step-by-step description of how to accomplish a task or lets you opt to have the task

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completed for you automatically. Click "Show me step-by-step" or "Do it automatically." with the latter letting you observe all the steps by following a green arrow that floats across the screen, pointing and clicking the appropriate options. Each topic even recommends whether to use the automated process, or the step-by-step option.

WHAT YOU NEED TO RUN VISTA

Microsoft will have six versions of Vista available at launch--and two categories of hardware requirements (Windows Vista Capable and Vista Premium Ready) for running different levels of the OS. All versions of Vista will operate and provide basic functionality on a Windows Vista Capable machine, but for all versions except Vista Home Basic and Vista Starter, you'll want to go with a Vista Premium Ready configuration, at a minimum, to get access to all features. For the best experience, though, we'd recommend doubling the minimum requirements listed.

		RECOMMENDED
VISTA VERSION	WHO IT'S FOR, WHAT IT IS	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS
Windows Vista Ultimate	For advanced consumers or business users; the highest-end edition, combining the best features of all editions	Windows Vista Premium Ready Logo: 1GHz 32-bit or 64-bit processor; 1GB RAM; DirectX 9-capable graphics with 128MB of graphics memory and support for Windows Display Driver Model, Pixel Shader 2.0 in hardware, and 32-bit-per-pixel color; 40GB hard drive (with 15GB free); DVD-ROM drive
Windows Vista Home Basic	Analogous to Windows XP Home Edition, for basic consumer needs; includes Vista's new security and search capabilities, but does not include higher-end Aero graphics, Media Center, or Tablet PC features; no support for dual-core processors	Windows Vista Capable Logo: 800MHz 32-bit or 64-bit processor; 512MB RAM; DirectX 9-capable SVGA (800x600) graphics with 32MB of graphics memory; 20GB hard drive (with 15GB free); CD-ROM drive
Windows Vista Home Premium	For consumers who want advanced music, video, photography, and mobility features; includes support for Vista's higher-end graphics features, as well as Media Center and Tablet PC features; no support for dual-core processors	Windows Vista Premium Ready Logo: 1GHz 32-bit or 64-bit processor; 1GB RAM; DirectX 9-capable graphics with 128MB of graphics memory and support for Windows Display Driver Model, Pixel Shader 2.0 in hardware, and 32-bit-per-pixel color;

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		40GB hard drive (with 15GB free); DVD-ROM drive
Windows Vista Business	Analogous to Windows XP Professional, for small and medium-size businesses; includes improved security and reliability, as well as extra tools for small businesses; Tablet PC features	Windows Vista Premium Ready Logo: 1GHz 32-bit or 64-bit processor; 1GB RAM; DirectX 9-capable graphics with 128MB of graphics memory and support for Windows Display Driver Model, Pixel Shader 2.0 in hardware, and 32-bit-per-pixel color; 40GB hard drive (with 15GB free); DVD-ROM drive
Windows Vista Enterprise	For large enterprises with global IT infrastructures (available only to customers with volume licenses); includes all features of Vista Business, plus additional encryption and data-security features, Unix services, and virtual-machine capabilities; also includes Tablet PC features	Windows Vista Premium Ready Logo: 1GHz 32-bit or 64-bit processor; 1GB RAM; DirectX 9-capable graphics with 128MB of graphics memory and support for Windows Display Driver Model, Pixel Shader 2.0 in hardware, and 32-bit-per-pixel color; 40GB hard drive (with 15GB free); DVD-ROM drive
Windows Vista Starter	For consumers in emerging markets who have very basic computing needs (sold only on new PCs in markets such as India and Thailand); runs only on 32-bit machines; can run only three programs at a time	Windows Vista Capable Logo: 800MHz 32-bit processor; 512MB RAM; DirectX 9-capable SVGA (800x600) graphics with 32MB of graphics memory; 20GB hard drive (with 15GB free); CD-ROM drive

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A NEW VISTA; MICROSOFT'S LATEST OPERATING SYSTEM LOOKS GREAT AND HAS COOL FEATURES, BUT IT'S NOT TIME TO UPGRADE YET Detroit Free Press (Michigan) January 29, 2007 Monday

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Detroit Free Press (Michigan)

January 29, 2007 Monday
METRO FINAL Edition

SECTION: FTR; FEATURES; Pg. 1

LENGTH: 2309 words

HEADLINE: A NEW VISTA;
MICROSOFT'S LATEST OPERATING SYSTEM LOOKS GREAT AND HAS COOL FEATURES, BUT IT'S NOT TIME TO UPGRADE YET

BODY:

Tuesday, for the first time in almost six years, you have the chance to open a new set of Windows.

Windows Vista hits the consumer market for PC owners, the first upgrade from Microsoft since Windows XP in 2001. Vista offers new features and a graphically spiffed-up screen - along with a price tag and required hardware list that will leave some computer owners in the dust.

Here what you need to know about the new operating system:

What changes were made in how Vista looks?

The way the screen looks is one of the best things about Vista. Menus, screens and options are soothing to the eyes, with lots of 3D effects and transparency reminiscent of Apple's MacOS operating system. You can flip through the windows you have open like a 3D stack of flash cards, complete with a mini-view of what's happening in them live.

Your Start menu doesn't expand to cover your entire desktop any more; instead, each sub-menu you click on replaces the one you were looking at.

You can mouse over items on the taskbar to see a live thumbnail of them.

The best part of the desktop is the Windows sidebar, which comes with gadgets you can display on your desktop but also includes the ability to design custom gadgets that you can download.

Should I upgrade my computer to Vista?

Probably not. Right now, some programs won't run on Vista, and some older hardware will have issues until manufacturers release Vista-specific drivers. If your computer is more than a couple of years old, it probably doesn't have a graphics card capable of showing off Vista's new graphics features.

In general, it's always a good idea to wait six months or so before installing a new operating system, to give everyone else the chance to be a guinea pig for any potential bugs.

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Should I buy a new PC with Vista on it?

If the computer you really want comes with Vista installed, it's not a reason not to get the machine (unless you use old programs or hardware accessories). If you act quickly, you may have the option for the best of both worlds with a "Vista-ready" PC.

What do I get with a "Vista-ready" PC?

Read the fine print. Some manufacturers merely guarantee that their computers meet the hardware **requirements** for Vista. But if you hurry you can buy a PC **capable** of running **Vista**, that is loaded with **Windows XP** and comes with coupons to get Vista upgrade disks. You get Vista without buying it separately, but don't have to install it right away, so others work out the kinks.

What hardware does it take to run Windows Vista?

The basic requirements include an 800MHz processor, 512 megabytes of system memory (RAM) and a graphics processor that can handle DirectX 9 (a fairly recent graphics card).

You probably shouldn't upgrade to Vista unless they meet the recommended Premium requirements, which include a 1GHz processor, 1 GB of system memory, a 128 MB graphics card that supports WDDM/Pixel Shader 2.0/32 bits per pixel, 40 GB hard drive with at least 15 GB of free space and a DVD drive.

What does Vista have for parents?

Vista's parental controls track when and how kids use the computer, limit the amount of time and time of day they can use it, and restrict which games they can play by ESRB rating. They include a Web filter (highly customizable for what you don't want your kids to see), activity reports and the ability to block some programs and block downloads.

It'll track what applications kids run, what they listen to, what sites they visit, what games they play and even monitor e-mail and instant messaging.

The new photo preview features allow simple editing - removing red eye, cropping, etc. - right in the preview window. Photos can be tagged with key words - who's in them, where they were taken - for easy sorting using Windows Search later.

What does Vista have for gamers?

Many of the promised improvements for gamers never materialized in the finished version of Vista (including true plug-and-play for PC game DVDs). Vista does ship with DirectX 10, a new set of high-end Windows sound and graphics functions, and an interesting change: game manufacturers can no longer support just some of the features of DirectX (special effects in graphics or 3D effects in sounds, for example) - they've got to support them all. That means that Vista-ready games may look and sound a little better (and hopefully run a bit more reliably) than their previous versions.

How does its voice recognition work?

Vista allows you, after a 15 minutes of training, to control what it does using your voice and a microphone or headset. You can even control the mouse in detail, using quadrant-based controls. It's a terrific feature for those who do lots of repetitive Windows tasks to avoid stressing out their fingers and wrists, and may help those with disabilities.

What is the new Search feature?

Search is one of the best new parts of Windows Vista. It shows up in a variety of ways, including a search box right on your Start menu that allows you to pull up a program on your computer by merely typing the first few characters in its name.

Search makes file organization easier, because instead of having to organize items into folders, you can

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just save a search that causes all of those files to come up.

How does Vista try to help me avoid losing files?

There's a new backup-and-restore feature for files - bare bones compared to what you can buy in aftermarket software, but still a big improvement over what previously shipped with Windows. Windows also keeps track of previous versions of files, so if you goof, you can revert to a previous version.

Does Vista make any other system tasks easier?

Yes and no. Things like defragmenting your hard drive and indexing your files are harder to manually control. That said, most people didn't do those tasks often anyway, because of the system resources they ate up - and now those programs are placed in the background with low priority, so they shouldn't interfere with other computing tasks.

New systems features for more advanced users will solve some longstanding problems in Windows. The network diagnosis tool shows you exactly what your computer thinks your network looks like, for example, and you can finally track what's making your hard disk grind. Failure logs are more robust and help track exactly when your computer started having issues. Wireless network listings show what level of security the available networks have.

Windows also uses a couple of behind-the-scenes abilities - SuperFetch, which pre-loads files you're likely to use into memory, and ReadyBoost, which uses flash memory like any USB flash drive you plug in - to speed up system performance.

Is Vista secure?

Vista makes it a little harder for people to accidentally say "yes" to viruses and other malicious programs they download. If a program is going to make a change to how Windows functions, the screen will go black and the user will be asked whether to allow that change.

There are already reports of viruses that get around that feature.

Smart users will continue to run aftermarket programs to beef up their defenses against malicious sites, programs and code on the Internet.

What version should I buy?

Windows Vista comes in three (technically four) flavors: Home Basic, Home Premium and Ultimate. Business versions were released in December, and a Starter edition will come installed primarily on very low-end PCs.

If you've got a top-end machine and consider yourself a fairly knowledgeable computer user - one who likes to muck around with some systems settings - you'll be happiest with Ultimate. Everyone else should probably opt for Premium because many of the powerful new features of Vista aren't available in Basic.

SIDEBARS

REVIEW: VISTA OFFERS GREAT NEW FEATURES, BUT AT A PRICE

Windows Vista may represent a long-overdue upgrade for most people's computer desktops, but the majority of folks won't be seeing it anytime soon.

Vista's new features are solid upgrades over Windows XP. Vista looks better, performs better and, despite recent security scares, is likely to be less vulnerable to viruses and malicious programs for the average home user.

But its beefy hardware requirements mean that you've got to have a recent PC to run it (or upgrade your old one's graphics capabilities).

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And the steep price - \$159 and up for the versions that really show you what the new Windows can do - means that a lot of people will, understandably, wait to upgrade.

Though Vista is based on a new core operating system, most home users will see it as Windows XP version 2.0. It bears a lot of similarity to the previous software, but it looks a lot better and does the things they'll probably think XP should have done to begin with.

The parental controls, in particular, are detailed and easy to use, allowing you as little or as much control and information about your kids' PC usage as you could possibly want.

The file search capabilities of Windows Search are easier and more powerful than anything in previous versions, and will probably relieve the headache of figuring out where files went and relieve the need for complex folder structures.

Vista looks gorgeous. The Active Desktop really is active, with all kind of little widgets that you can arrange the way you like, and new ones available every day as people start to develop for the software.

Some features of the desktop seem cribbed from Apple's MacOS operating systems, but as a Windows user, I'm all for it. Getting the best features of other operating systems in the one that I'm most likely to use makes for a better computing experience.

System performance, assuming you have a beefy machine, is dandy. I wish that Microsoft had finished WinFS, the new file storage system, in time for Vista's release - it was reputed to dramatically speed up system performance - but Vista doesn't act bloated.

There's nothing in this package that will drive you to upgrade today, and people with older hardware and programs should probably wait as long as possible in hopes their equipment will be supported. But when you do decide to move to Vista - and you will, inevitably - you should be pleasantly surprised by the changes.

Heather Newman

VERSIONS OF VISTA

Here are some of the features of the three consumer versions of Vista.

Home Basic

Price: \$99.95 to upgrade from Windows, \$199 for a full version

Includes: Windows Defender and Firewall for anti-virus/spyware protection, Windows Search for finding files more quickly.

Home Premium

Price: \$159/\$239

Includes: Everything in Basic plus the new graphical desktop including 3Windows Media Center, Windows Mobility Center for laptops, scheduled backup of user files, support for Tablet PCs and support for Windows SideShow.

Ultimate

Price: \$259/\$399

Includes: Everything in Premium except Windows Anytime Upgrade, plus automatically saved previous versions of files, Windows Fax and Scan, more powerful network controls (especially for wireless networks).

Search - 28 Results - (windows w/3 vista) w/10 capable w/10 requirement

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For more information see www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/editions. To see if your PC hardware is ready for Vista, see www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/upgradeadvisor/default.msp.

Expert users give Vista a try

The home user

Aaron Tienvisu, a 31-year-old consultant in Chester Township in western Michigan, uses Vista as part of his work at Berbee. But he also made the dramatic move of getting rid of Windows XP on his home machines a year ago, too, using exclusively pre-release versions of Vista and Microsoft Office 2007.

What he likes best: ReadyBoost, which uses flash memory-like plug-in USB drives to speed up the computer; file backup and restore abilities; SuperFetch, where Windows pre-loads documents you use often so they take less time to pull up; parental controls for kids, and voice recognition.

What he likes least: Drivers for his hardware that aren't ready yet, and "the amount of editions that are out there. I do Microsoft-related work every day and I am still learning the differences between all the different versions."

The gadget guy

Jordan deWitt, 29, of Waterford moderates AximUsers.com, a site for people who use the Dell Axim handheld computer. He tested Vista to see how it would work with Pocket PC devices so he could report those results to the site.

What he likes best: The way the interface looks; better security; better stability. The new Windows Mobile Device Center, which replaces ActiveSync for connecting desktop PCs with PocketPC portable devices, is a big improvement, he said, "in both speed and aesthetics."

What he likes least: The inconvenience that the new system security causes, thanks to additional "do you want to do X?" prompts. The fact that Microsoft's new file system - called WinFS - didn't make it into Vista. (Many of our experts cited it as a big drawback.) WinFS was supposed to speed up system performance significantly, but it wasn't done in time.

The business user

Bruce McCully, 29, is the founder of Dynamic Edge in Ann Arbor, a 35-person company that provides tech consulting to small and medium-sized businesses. He tested Vista to see how it will work for his clients.

What he likes best: "The interface is a lot prettier. Everything looks a lot sharper." His staff likes the network troubleshooting tools that show you a picture of what the computer thinks the network looks like, which helps them diagnose problems. Windows Search, which allows you to open a program from the Start menu by typing a couple of characters from its name, is another favorite. He liked the voice recognition as well.

What he likes least: The new hardware most businesses are going to need to run it, especially if they want to see the fancy new features. "I think a lot of businesses will end up being disappointed." He's also disappointed to miss out on WinFS.

Heather Newman

Contact HEATHER NEWMAN at 313-223-3336 or hnewman@freepress.com.

ILLUSTRATION: Photo

MEMO: SIDEBARS ATTACHED;LIFE

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High-End Vista-Ready Desktops

ARTICLE DATE: 09.06.06

By Joel Santo Domingo

For those currently on the hunt for a new desktop PC, here's one *more* thing to consider when shopping: the 800-pound gorilla that is Microsoft Windows Vista. For the consumer with a high-end desktop PC in mind, that means looking for a system with the kind of features and performance that can handle the best that Vista has to offer.

Once Vista is released (in January 2007, according to Microsoft), there will be three versions available to U.S. consumers: Vista Home Basic, Vista Home Premium, and Vista Ultimate. Vista Home Basic will be the default for budget PCs, just as Windows XP Home Edition is the standard bearer for home PCs these days. Vista Premium, which will be the standard for mainstream and Media Center PCs, adds the much-vaunted Aero effects (including translucent windows, Flip 3D, and smooth moving windows), as well as HDTV and DVD authoring and mobile and tablet interfaces. Vista Ultimate includes the features of Vista Home Premium, plus all the business-related features of Vista Business and Vista Enterprise. It includes such high-end features as IIS, a built-in Web server, dual processor support, remote desktop capability, Virtual PC, game performance enhancements, and Podcast creation support, as well as special online services and tech support options.

For a system to qualify as simply "Vista-Capable," according to Microsoft, all it needs are an 800-Mhz processor, 512MB of system memory, and a DirectX 9-capable graphics processor—specs that are common even in "budget" (read: cheap) systems these days. As long as you're using a system bought within the last few years, Vista Home Basic should run on your current machine.

Systems that are Vista *Premium*-ready carry a longer list of goodies: at least 1GB of system memory, a 1-GHz or faster processor, DX9 graphics capability, Pixel Shader 2.0 at 32 bits per pixel (millions of colors), 128MB of graphics memory, 15GB of free drive space on a 40+GB hard drive, DVD-ROM, Audio out, and Internet access. Most, if not all, high-end and gaming systems produced in the last few years, as well as more recent mainstream systems, will fall into this category.

Vista Ultimate is the "everything including the kitchen sink" version of Windows Vista, so you'll want to look for really high-end features to make it worthwhile. Since Ultimate supports the "BitLocker" data encryption scheme from Vista Enterprise, you should look for a PC that supports TPM (Trusted Platform Module) security hardware if you plan on encrypting your files to keep them away from prying eyes. If you're going to use other features like IIS (Internet Information Services), Ultimate's built-in Web server, then you should go for a dual (or quad) core system with at least 2GB of system memory and a large hard drive, particularly if you're going to build your own Web sites and serve multimedia. You can do work from home, accessing your work desktop and vice versa using Ultimate's Remote Desktop feature, but you'll need an always-on Internet broadband connection to use this effectively. And of course, if you're a hardcore gamer, a high-powered enthusiast graphics card (or two) like the ATI Radeon X1950, the nVidia GeForce 7950 GX2, or the upcoming GeForce 8 series will give you a leg up on the game grid. Last but not least, HDTV tuners will come in handy if you're looking to build the Ultimate PC to go along with Windows Vista Ultimate. The **Gateway FX510XT**, our **Editors' Choice**, is a great example of a high-end desktop that can handle all that Vista Ultimate can throw at it, and at a price that doesn't border on the outrageous.

You should also keep in mind that, while the system you buy (or even the one you currently own) may not be Vista Premium- or Ultimate- ready, you can bring many recently produced desktops up to speed by adding system memory (an easy procedure), a new graphics card (a somewhat more complex, but still simple, procedure), or more drive space (very easy with an external drive, a little more complex with an internal drive). Similar to the Windows 98 to XP transition a few years ago, a good system today with room for upgrades tomorrow will be fine for using Windows Vista.

Falcon Northwest Mach V (Core 2 Extreme)

This high-end gaming system par excellence, with its Core 2 Extreme's core components, will certainly handle Vista in all shapes and forms. Our test system came with 2GB of system memory, a whopping 300GB of hard drive space, and an overclocked Intel Core 2 Extreme X6800 processor and dual ATI Radeon graphics cards in a CrossFire configuration.

Gateway FX510XT

It may not be as flashy-looking as the boutique gaming boxes, but inside Gateway's top-of-the-line gaming/media system is an Intel Core 2 Extreme processor, a terabyte of hard drive space, and a pair of ATI Radeon X1900 XT graphics cards arranged in a CrossFire configuration. It's more than ready for Windows Vista Premium, with a built-in TV tuner, 4GB of DDR2-667 SDRAM memory, and space for future upgrades.

WinBook Jiv Mini

The class leader among mini Media Center PCs, this also bears a Vista Capable sticker. Notable for being one of the smallest PCs available with a built-in TV tuner, it comes with 1GB of system memory, a 100GB hard drive, and a 1.66-GHz dual core Intel Core Duo T2400 processor.

Sony Vaio VGC-LS1

This very attractive desktop is a very good interpretation of the all-in-one Media Center. Two gigabytes of memory, a dual core Intel Core Duo T2400 processor, dual-layer DVD burner, and 250GB SATA hard drive help it earn its Vista stripes. It should also run Vista Premium, though Ultimate will be overkill (the system won't be able to take advantage of some of Premium's features, like game optimization and HDTV).

Falcon Northwest Mach V with Core 2 Extreme

ARTICLE DATE: 07.14.06

By Joel Santo Domingo

After getting my hands on and testing the shiny new Falcon Northwest Mach V (\$6,995 direct, \$8,095 with 20-inch widescreen LCD monitor) powered by Intel's cutting-edge Core 2 Extreme (aka Conroe) processor, all I could say was, "Wow." This rig smokes my current set of benchmark tests, significantly raising the bar for any system that comes after it. If this performance is any indication of what to expect from the average Core 2 CPU, AMD should be very worried.

Read the full review: Falcon Northwest Mach V with Core 2 Extreme

Gateway FX510XT

ARTICLE DATE: 09.05.06

By Joel Santo Domingo

Gateway's top-of-the-line gaming/media system, the FX510XT (\$3,966 direct, \$4,240 with 21-inch widescreen monitor) isn't cheap, but in the high-end luxury desktop space, it's a good example of bang for the buck. It isn't as flashy-looking as the gaming boxes from Dell XPS, Falcon Northwest, and Voodoo, but what's inside is what counts, and here the FX510XT shines. It offers components quite similar to those in boutique boxes, and it performs accordingly.

Read the full review: Gateway FX510XT

WinBook Jiv Mini

ARTICLE DATE: 07.26.06

The wonderfully designed WinBook Jiv Mini (\$1,200 direct, without monitor) Media Center PC is the perfect

home-theater PC—not just because of its small size, but because it's powerful and has all the ports you need. If you've got a hankering for a modern, multimedia-savvy computer, but don't want the extra clutter associated with a tower desktop, today's your lucky day.

Read the full review: WinBook Jiv Mini

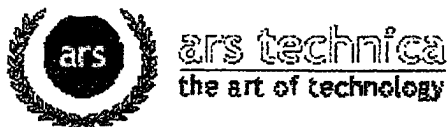
Sony Vaio VGC-LS1

ARTICLE DATE: 07.26.06

Only a few major manufacturers of all-in-one desktop computers remain, and Sony—along with Gateway and Apple—is one of them. And now comes Sony's latest salvo, the Sony VAIO VGC-LS1 (\$2,099 direct). With its gorgeous widescreen monitor, this all-in-one desktop may *look* like a 19-inch LCD HDTV, but it is so much more: It's a Media Center PC that even my wife wouldn't throw out of the bedroom. If it weren't for a couple of glitches, I'd call it the perfect all-in-one PC. As it stands however, the LS1 is a PC/TV combo I would *almost* be willing to rush out and buy tomorrow.

Read the full review: Sony Vaio VGC-LS1

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Microsoft unleashes Vista, Office upgrade campaigns

By Matt Mondok | Published: October 24, 2006 - 08:51PM CT

Starting October 26, 2006, Microsoft will begin two new upgrade programs for consumers: one for Vista and the other for Office 2007. The Vista path will be known as the Express Upgrade to Windows Vista program while the Office path will be called the Microsoft Office Technology Guarantee program.

Running until March 15, 2007, both efforts will give consumers who purchase new PCs equipped with Windows XP or Microsoft Office 2003 upgrades to Vista and/or Office 2007. Original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) such as Dell, Hewlett-Packard (HP), and Gateway will dictate how the program is presented to their customers. System builders, on the other hand, will be given upgrade coupons from Microsoft that they can then distribute to new PC buyers.

According to [eWeek](#), most of the upgrade paths will be free of charge. For instance, consumers in the United States will be entitled to a Windows Vista Home Premium upgrade when they purchase a new PC that has Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005 installed. Those buying PCs running Windows XP Professional, Windows Tablet PC Edition, and Windows XP Professional x64 Edition can upgrade to Windows Vista Business and Windows Vista Business 64. The only costs that the aforementioned consumers will incur is shipping and handling. As for upgrades that will not be free, consumers wanting to upgrade from Windows XP Home will be required to pay

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either US\$49 for Windows Vista Home Basic or US\$79 for Windows Vista Home Premium, not to mention the cost of shipping and handling. Consumers that choose to take advantage of the Office upgrade path will only need to pay shipping and handling fees.

Although Microsoft will not limit the upgrades to PCs labeled Premium Ready, the company is recommending that consumers purchase a new PC with the branding. A Premium Ready computer is one that can utilize all the components of Vista including the Aero user interface. It has at least a 1 GHz processor, 1 GB of RAM, support for DirectX 9 with a WDDM driver, 128 MB of graphics memory, 40 GB of hard drive space, a DVD drive, audio output capabilities, and Internet access.

HP, who Microsoft will let control their own upgrades, will be issuing Vista upgrades with their Compaq Presario and HP Pavilion lineup. The company claims that 98 percent of their new consumer PCs are Windows Vista capable. Tiffany Smith, an HP representative, said, "In North America, approximately 98 percent of HP consumer PCs are Microsoft Windows Vista Capable—direct customers can still custom configure a with 256MB of memory, so that's why we say 98 percent—and more than 85 percent are Windows Vista Premium Ready."

This announcement should certainly put to rest any questions of a Windows Vista delay past January. Microsoft has given every indication that the operating system is ready to go out the door. For those planning to start 2007 off with Windows Vista, will you be buying a new PC, building your own, or using your current hardware setup?

Filed under: Vista, Microsoft, Operating Systems, Business

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Microsoft unleashes Vista, Office upgrade campaigns

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Get Ready for VistaSpeak

Windows Vista will introduce a whole new lexicon of PC terms. Here's a quick glossary.

Yardena Arar, PC World

Wednesday, May 24, 2006 04:00 PM PDT

Like all Windows before it, Windows Vista will introduce a number of new technologies and features—and, as usual, Microsoft has coined terms (most of them trademarked) for each and every one. Here's a quick glossary.

BitLocker: Drive-encryption technology designed to safeguard data from unauthorized users. The feature is primarily intended to protect systems that have been stolen or hacked.

Certified for Windows Vista: The wording on a sticker indicating that a peripheral or non-PC device can take advantage of features in Windows Vista, such as SideShow. This is a step up from Works With Windows Vista.

FlexGo: A Microsoft-backed program to sell PCs in emerging economies using the pay-as-you-go model that has proved successful for cell phones. Individuals in developing nations would be able to take home a \$600 PC for as little as \$250 to \$300, but it would have usage-monitoring software on it, and after a certain amount of time, the PC would shut down until the owner purchased cards for additional system time. After the owner had made enough additional payments, they would own the system outright.

OCUR (OpenCable Unidirectional Receiver): Devices such as TV tuners that will leverage Windows Vista's HDTV features, including support for one-way CableCards, digital video recording, and the ability to stream recorded programs to Media Center Extenders throughout a home.

ReadyBoost: A cheap alternative to buying extra RAM, ReadyBoost lets your PC use free memory on a USB flash drive to augment RAM. You'd need, at a minimum, a drive with 256MB of free space that can read data at 2.5 megabits per second and write at 1.5 mbps; to qualify for a Windows Vista logo, the drive would need 500MB of space and have read/write speeds of 5 mbps/3 mbps, respectively.

SPR (System Performance Rating): This is basically a benchmark that assigns a numerical rating (on a scale of 1 to 5) to your system and identifies components that are slowing it down. It's accessible from the Vista Control Panel.

SuperFetch: Technology that's supposed to speed up system performance by optimizing system memory based on monitoring how you use your PC.

Windows Connect Now: Technology designed to simplify setup of network devices in general and Wi-Fi devices in particular. Based on the Wi-Fi Alliance's forthcoming Simple Config, Connect Now technology would make Wi-Fi devices that use it instantly visible to a designated Registrar (for most people, this would be a Windows Vista PC) that would configure it over the air after the user had verified ownership by typing in a PIN provided with the device. When Vista ships, it will not support wireless configuration of the first Connect Now router in a home; you'll still need to go through the ethernet hookup. Microsoft expects to release a software update that will enable wireless setup for initial routers or access points.

Windows Rally: A family of technologies designed to simplify setup, security, and management of networked devices. Rally

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technologies include Windows Connect Now for easy Wi-Fi setup; Plug and Play Extensions (PnP-x) for easy installation of networked-connected devices; and the Link Layer Topology Discovery protocol for easy discovery of networked devices.

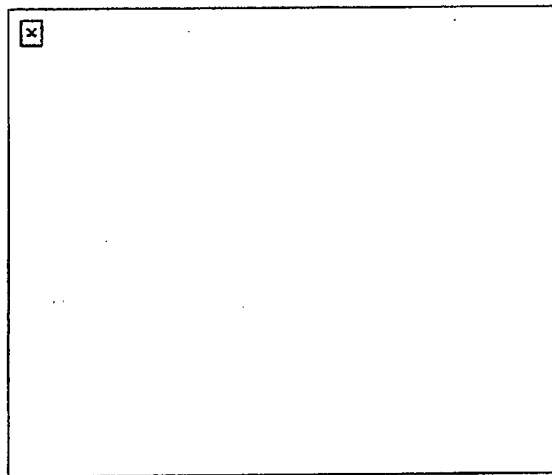
Windows SideShow: Technology that affords access to data on Windows Vista PCs—even when they're hibernating—from auxiliary displays on a range of devices, such as a small LCD on the lid of a closed laptop or a Windows Mobile Smartphone. You could use a SideShow device to check an Outlook calendar or contact data, and third-party developers will be able to write SideShow-aware applications.

Windows Vista Capable: Wording on a sticker that indicates a PC will be able to run Windows Vista, but without all its bells and whistles. Not as good as Windows Vista Premium Ready.

Windows Vista Premium Ready: A sticker with this phrase indicates that the PC can run Windows Vista with its most resource-intensive options, including the Aero interface. Better than Windows Vista Capable.

Works With Windows Vista: This designates a peripheral or device that won't crash if you use it with Windows Vista, but doesn't particularly benefit from use with the operating system. Not as good as a Certified for Windows Vista sticker.

XPS (XML Paper Specification): A new XML-based document format that's compatible with the XML file formats in Office 2007 and offers some of the benefits of Adobe's PDF. An XPS document viewer is integrated into Internet Explorer 7 in Windows Vista, and the OS also can create XPS documents from other applications through the use of a virtual print driver.



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Get ready for Windows Vista

Updated 11/16/2006 7:33 PM ET

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CyberSpeak
Kim Komando

Microsoft's Windows Vista is almost here. Businesses with volume license agreements can get it Nov. 30. Home users must wait until Jan. 30. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't prepare. This is particularly true if you're buying a new computer.

TIPS: Ask Kim

Upgrading to Vista is sure to be confusing. So here are some things you need to know.

Vista versions

With Windows XP, it was easy to decide which version to buy because there were only two choices, Home and Professional. But Vista will have five versions. This is confusing, so you may need to read this twice.

- **Home Basic (\$200 full; \$100 upgrade):** This covers the basics like surfing the Internet and creating documents. There are parental control features, but you won't find many of the interesting media features.
- **Home Premium (\$239 full; \$159 upgrade):** Home Premium will turn your computer into a media hub and features Vista's Aero design, which is intended to make it easier to navigate through Windows. There are improved organizational tools for documents and media files.
- **Vista Business (\$300 full; \$200 upgrade):** This is geared for the business user. It won't have many of the fancy media tools, but it has built-in protections against malware. There are also tools to make backups easier.
- **Vista Ultimate (\$400 full; \$259 upgrade):** Vista Ultimate is a hybrid of Vista Business and Home Premium. It lets you use your computer as a media center, but has the enhanced business features, too.
- **Vista Enterprise (only available in volume license):** The Enterprise edition boasts drive encryption. You also can run old programs on earlier versions of Windows within the Enterprise edition. That will be handy if the old program will not run on Vista itself.

Upgrading can save you \$100 or more, but only Windows 2000 or Windows XP can be upgraded. That's not surprising. Computers with earlier Windows versions are likely to be overwhelmed by Vista.

System requirements

Microsoft makes two distinctions for hardware requirements: Vista Capable and Vista Premium Ready PCs. With new PCs, you will notice the Vista-ready labels.

A Vista Capable machine must have at least an 800MHz processor. It also needs at least 512 megabytes of memory and a DirectX9 capable graphics processor.

A Vista Premium Ready PC will have at least a 1-gigahertz processor and 1 gigabyte of memory. It must have a DirectX9 graphics card with a Windows Display Driver Model (WDDM). It also requires 128MB of graphics memory.

Vista is the first version of Windows to adapt to the capabilities of the machine. This means a more advanced machine provides a better user experience.

Upgrading your current machine

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If you're not buying a new machine, check the Vista Upgrade Advisor at www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/upgradeadvisor. It scans your machine for known issues.

Connect your printer, scanner and other gadgets before proceeding. It will check their compatibility. It also checks your basic system resources and software.

You may need to upgrade system components. Printers and scanners may need updated drivers. Software issues are more complex. Check the manufacturers' sites.

New machines and upgrade coupons

If you buy a new machine, look for the Vista-ready stickers. And pay attention to the XP version installed on the machine.

Machines purchased through March 15, 2007, may be eligible for an upgrade. The coupon entitles you to a free or discounted upgrade to Vista. Most manufacturers will offer coupons.

The version of XP on the machine determines which version of Vista you can get. For information from each manufacturer, visit Microsoft's site. It links to details on individual manufacturers' sites.
www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/expressupgrade.mspx.

Kim Komando hosts the nation's largest talk radio show about computers and the Internet. To get the podcast or find the station nearest you, visit: www.komando.com/listen. To subscribe to Kim's free e-mail newsletters, sign up at: www.komando.com/newsletters. Contact her at gnsstech@gns.gennett.com.

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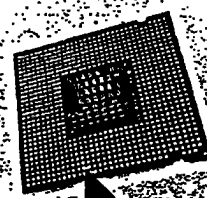
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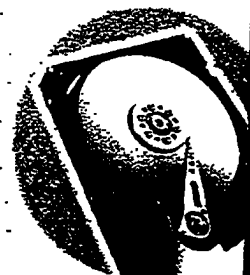
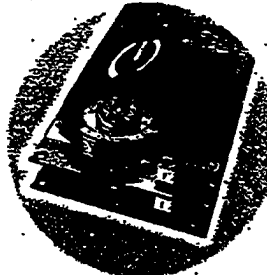
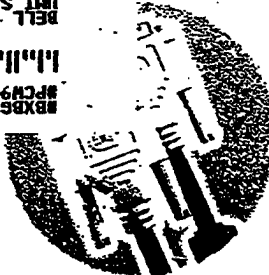
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HERE'S HOW

HARDWARE TIPS

KIRK STEERS

Plan Ahead to Extend the Life of Your Hardware

COMPUTERS ARE IN transition: Technologies such as the PCI Express bus and all-digital video connectors are supplanting their predecessors. More important, Microsoft's new Windows Vista is right around the corner. Anyone who's thinking of buying PC hardware in the next few months must keep an eye on the future.

If the transition to Windows XP is any lesson, the biggest potential hassle of a Vista upgrade is lack of support for legacy hardware and peripherals. Before moving to the new OS, check with your printer, scanner, and other peripheral manufacturers to learn whether they plan to offer Vista drivers for your product.

To help ease the move, Microsoft has created the Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor, a free program that examines your system's hardware and attached peripherals to identify possible driver and hardware conflicts, as well as other compatibility problems. Browse to find.pcworld.com/54172 for the download.

If you're ready to buy a PC now, with an eye toward upgrading to Vista down

the road, stick to a Vista Premium Ready machine rather than choosing one that supports only Vista Basic (browse to find.pcworld.com/54861 for a description of the various Vista releases). And no matter



FIGURE 1: ADD SATA ports to a non-SATA PC with Adaptec's DuoConnect 5020 card.

which version of Vista you plan to run, don't buy any less than 1GB of RAM.

The following tips will help you get the most out of your hardware—current and future—for many years to come.

Leave room for RAM: Make sure that you have space for future memory upgrades. Your new PC should have at least one free RAM socket (check with the vendor to determine expandability options for systems with dual-channel memory setups). Also, leave some room for expansion when you upgrade: Don't install two modules if you can get the same amount of RAM on one. Always consult your motherboard manual before buying memory, however, as some systems require that

the RAM modules be installed in pairs. **Avoid PCI cards:** If your machine has both an open PCI Express slot and a PCI slot available, use a PCI Express card rather than its PCI equivalent for such internal components as a wired or wireless network adapter. If PCI Express isn't an option, add an external USB 2.0 version of the device. It may cost a bit more, but USB devices are easy to transfer to other computers, and USB should be around long after the PCI bus is history.

Choose SATA, not PATA: Make sure that your new PC has at least two Serial ATA connectors. Some budget systems offer only older Parallel ATA connectors, and others come with a single SATA slot. If you're adding a new internal hard drive, make it a SATA drive, which is easier to install, has slimmer cabling to help cooling air circulate in the case, and can be transferred to future PCs, which are likely not to have PATA connectors at all.

If your current system lacks a SATA connector, use Addonics' \$30 Serial ATA to IDE converter (find.pcworld.com/54174) to link a SATA drive to your IDE port. Or add multiple SATA ports via Adaptec's \$80 DuoConnect 5020 PCI card (find.pcworld.com/54176; see FIGURE 1), which includes two SATA ports and five USB 2.0 ports. Always get the highest-capacity drive you can afford; eventually you'll use the space. Microsoft requires a whopping 15GB of free disk space just for Vista.

Go digital: Some hard-core gamers still prefer the quick response and clarity of analog CRT displays, but most users today want an LCD equipped with an all-digital connection through a DVI port. If you're buying a new monitor or graphics card, check that it provides a DVI connection. If necessary, use VGA-to-DVI and DVI-to-VGA adapters (available at any computer store for less than \$10) to support your current hardware.

Go to find.pcworld.com/31511 for past Hardware Tips columns. Send your tips and questions to kirk_steers@pcworld.com. We pay \$50 for published items. Kirk Steers is a PC World contributing editor and the author of *PC Upgrading and Troubleshooting Quicksteps* from McGraw Hill/Osborne Press.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK SIMON

WHEN BAD DISCS GO GOOD

HAVE YOU EVER lost an important file on a DVD or CD? InDisc Recovery 3 from OctaneSoft makes it easy for you to recover all or parts of files stored on damaged or corrupted DVDs or CDs that Windows is unable to access. The program can read files on media created with Nero Burning ROM, Roxio Easy CD/DVD Creator, and other ISO-9660 CD or DVD writing software. InDisc Recovery 3 is free to try, and \$25 to buy (find.pcworld.com/54178).

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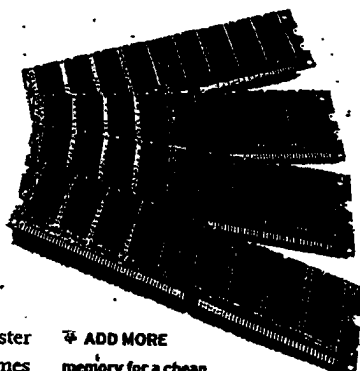
Memory

COMPUTER MEMORY MAY not get worse with age, but it does get outmoded. Older DDR SDRAM is rapidly being supplanted by DDR2 memory, which in turn will be overtaken by faster DDR3 memory when it becomes available within the next couple of years. As with processors, each

type of memory requires a motherboard with a compatible RAM socket, meaning that you can't just pop DDR2 memory into a computer designed for DDR SDRAM memory. But regardless of what type of RAM your system uses, adding more remains one of the cheapest and most effective upgrades.

Faster memory is desirable, but the most important thing is having enough. PCs slow down drastically when they run out of real memory and have to start swapping data into much slower virtual memory on your hard drive. That situation often arises when you run many applications at once, or when you use video-editing or other programs that shuffle a lot of data. Our tests, which involve working with images and using Nero Express to burn CDs, ran one-third faster when we upgraded from 512MB of RAM to 1GB.

Generally, 1GB of memory is enough for Windows XP. But if you want to use Vista with your existing system, you may need more memory. Because of new fea-



➤ **ADD MORE**
memory for a cheap
and efficient upgrade.

tures like SuperFetch and larger overall memory demands, most analysts agree, Redmond's new OS will be happiest when working with 2GB or more.

For a quick, informal check of your memory needs, open a typical set of applications. Then open the Task Manager and click the Performance tab. Look at the line for 'Available' under 'Physical Memory (K).' If things feel sluggish and the reading is near zero, you need to shop for more RAM.

Before you buy, use a tool such as Sandra Lite (see "Gauge How Hard Your System Is Working," page 108) to figure out the type and amount of memory your computer currently has. Or head to a site such as Crucial.com or Kingston.com, enter your motherboard or PC model number, and receive an automatic ID of the type of RAM your system takes. Most PCs being upgraded today use dual-channel memory, which must be installed in pairs for maximum performance; so be sure to buy two matched chips when arranging for your upgrade.

Typically, you'll have to install the RAM in alternating slots—1 and 3, or 2 and 4—to use dual-channel memory access.

Since most motherboards have a maximum of four sockets for memory, you may have to pull out some (or all) of your existing memory before adding new modules. Also, check your current memory's speed with Sandra or another diagnostic program. Though many faster chips may be compatible with your system, they will all operate at the slower speed if you use a mix of slower and faster memory modules.

BEFORE/AFTER

DISCS BURN FASTER

	WorldBench 5.1	Nero Express 6.0.0.5
512MB DDR SDRAM	75	954
1024MB DDR SDRAM	78	687

TEST: FOOTNOTES: *Test system with 2.6-GHz Pentium 4 CPU. *Overall test score; higher is better. *Timed subject (in seconds); lower is better.

STEP-BY-STEP

HOW TO INSTALL NEW MEMORY



➤ **LINE UP** the bottom notch on the chip with the corresponding bump in the socket, and gently push the new memory into place with both hands (step 5).

SWAPPING OUT MEMORY is among the quickest and easiest of PC upgrades. Here's how to do it:

[1] **POWER DOWN** your PC, open its case, and ground yourself as usual by touching the metal case or using an antistatic wrist strap.

[2] **FIND OUT** whether and how your memory sockets are paired, and maintain that arrangement for best dual-channel performance. The pairing is often designated by color or a graphic on the motherboard itself.

[3] **IF YOU NEED** to remove an existing module, gently push down on the clips

on either side of the RAM socket. The module will pop up slightly and should be easy to pull out.

[4] **TO INSTALL** your new memory, line up the notch at the bottom of the memory chip with the corresponding bump in the memory socket.

[5] **WITH YOUR** fingers positioned at each end of the module, gently but firmly push down on it until the latches click into place.

[6] **CLOSE UP** your system, power on, and confirm that the PC recognizes the new RAM. If it doesn't, power down and reseat the modules.

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Coming Soon: Hot Deals on Closeout PCs

Prices will be very friendly this holiday season, but know what you're getting.

WE'RE FAST APPROACHING the home stretch of the busiest PC buying season, and that means retailers and e-tailers will be throwing out lures—all sorts of shiny new machines priced to move. This year more than most, the range of choices should be impressive, with new Core 2 Duo systems poised to duke it out with PCs based on older (but still quite serviceable) Intel and AMD chips. As a result, bargains should abound, experts say.

"I think there will be deals across the board," Roger Kay, founder and president of the technology research firm Endpoint Technologies, declares. "Prices will become very aggressive this holiday season," IDC analyst Richard Shim says.

Yet the abundance of options makes it more important than ever for you to know what you're buying. Dirt-cheap computers are nothing new, but this season many vendors will be trying to unload obsolete PCs alongside more modern hardware. Here are a few things to think about before signing the credit card slip.

Consider waiting for Windows Vista: PC World will review the final version as soon as it's available, but I suspect many of you have already decided whether you want to have the new operating system sooner, later, or not at all. Where you stand on that question should play a big part in your shopping plans.

If you're bound and determined to get Vista as soon as you can, I would advise postponing a PC purchase until the OS

launches in the early part of next year, when vendors should begin selling PCs with Vista preinstalled. I don't care how Vista-ready a Windows XP system is: Performing system upgrades just isn't much fun. And are you ready to bet that Vista drivers will be immediately available for

"I wouldn't get a machine after October that didn't have a [Vista] coupon," Endpoint's Kay says. Even if you aren't in a big rush to get Vista, you might still want it eventually—preferably on the PC vendor's dime, of course—so factor coupons into your buying decision.

And pay attention to which version of Vista the coupon is for. Microsoft says only the top two (out of three) consumer editions—Vista Home Premium (suggested upgrade price: \$159) and Vista Ultimate (suggested upgrade price: \$259)—will support the OS's snazzy Aero graphics, which feature semitransparent window frames and other visual tricks. You won't get the flashy stuff with the low-end Vista Home Basic (suggested upgrade price: \$100).

Be ready to be Vista-ready: The corollary to not buying a computer unless it comes with a Vista upgrade coupon is that you shouldn't buy a system that can't handle Vista—or that, at the very least, can't easily be upgraded to handle Vista. And by "handle,"

I don't mean merely tolerate. If you want Vista at all, you want a system that can work smoothly with its Aero graphics and all of its enhancements—and one that won't choke if you decide to run a couple of applications simultaneously. In short, you'll want your new computer to be able to meet Microsoft's Vista Premium Ready requirements, rather than the puny Vista Capable requirements.

It's actually hard to find a new system containing a CPU that doesn't meet



all your components? I didn't think so.

"But," I can hear some of you grumbling. "I really want to buy now, and I'm ready, willing, and able to do the upgrade." Two words to remember before you buy: *upgrade coupon*. Most experts expect that by mid-fall, to encourage immediate PC purchases, many vendors will offer coupons for a free or discounted copy of Windows Vista (when it ships) to people who are buying Windows XP systems.

CONSUMER WATCH

the Vista Premium Ready requirements (1 GHz for 32-bit CPUs or any 64-bit processor). True, you might have trouble tracking down a system based on Intel's red-hot Core 2 Duo chip priced at under \$1000, "but there are other processors out there that are just as functional, and Intel is putting in some pretty deep price cuts for them," IDC's Shim says.

If you're trying to keep your purchase under \$600 or \$700, look for desktops based on older dual-core technology—perhaps one of Intel's Pentium D chips. Make sure, however, that you're paying less than you would for a system based on a Core 2 Duo chip, because even the low-end Core 2 Duo systems we've seen beat all but the fastest Pentium D systems on our WorldBench 5 tests (see: find.pcworld.com/55150). You should also be able to find deals on systems based on AMD's dual-core Athlon 64 X2.

Buy sufficient RAM and graphics: It's somewhat more common to find PCs—especially notebooks—that don't have quite the system RAM or graphics hardware to run Vista at its best quality set-

tings. Vendors sometimes skimp on these items to keep their costs down on a cheap system. To run Vista with all its bells and whistles, you need a minimum of 1GB of RAM and a DirectX 9-capable graphics processor equipped with at least 128MB of graphics memory and support for Pixel Shader 2.0 and 32 bits per pixel.

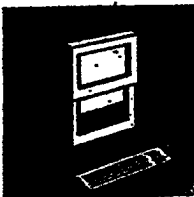
Also, don't rule out systems that have only integrated graphics: Some do meet the Vista requirements, and Microsoft says even the ones that rely on shared system memory will do just fine with 1GB of RAM (although you might want to add a little more just in case).

If you're not planning on upgrading to Vista right away, you won't need all that hardware—immediately. But if you think there's any possibility that you'll eventually spring for the upgrade, get a system with at least 1GB of RAM. In fact, to be Vista-ready down the road you should make sure you can upgrade to more than 1GB of RAM if your bargain machine has integrated graphics.

If you do purchase a computer with integrated graphics, also make sure its

PRIVACY WATCH

Are You Plugging USB Data Leaks?



ONE WEAK SPOT on any modern PC is the humble USB port. Tiny portable storage devices,

like an iPod, can use the port to suck down massive amounts of valuable data, an activity called podsniping.

Some companies install software on their PCs that can prevent podsniping. These programs give administrators the power to decide which devices an employee can connect to a PC, and enforce the restrictions even when a company laptop goes home or on the road with an employee. SmartLine's DeviceLock 6 (\$35, www.deviceclock.com) additionally provides control over what those devices can do. For instance, the administrator could allow you to

charge your iPod by hooking it to the USB port, but not let you use it to copy files. DeviceLock can also lock down CD and DVD drives, Bluetooth connections, FireWire ports, even the parallel port. And it can log the file names of every document you copy to a drive, or it can make what SmartLine calls "shadow copies" of everything you drop onto the drive. If an employee is later suspected of stealing data, the shadow copies provide the hard evidence.

Safend's USB Port Protector (\$32 per user, www.safend.com) can encrypt files copied to a portable drive so someone who finds it on the floor of a taxi or hotel room can't open those files.

If you're annoyed that your company restricts USB access, consider this: It's better than being the person who allows company data to be stolen.

—Andrew Brandt



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The HP StorageWorks DataSecure USB Internal Hard Drive is a secure and reliable way to store your data. It features a dual-core processor, 4GB of RAM, and a 160GB hard drive. It's perfect for home or office use.



CONSUMER WATCH

graphics subsystem meets the other specifications—the DX9 capability and the Pixel Shader 2.0 and 32-bits-per-pixel support—that Vista requires.

However, if your budget has any room for it, buy a system with a discrete graphics card. Doing so may even turn out to save you money: Ponying up for the card may cost less than buying additional RAM, and you'll certainly get better graphics performance.

Consider a notebook: If you're in the market for a laptop, IDC's Shim says you're in luck this year. "There's always been this price obstacle that kind of deterred the average consumer and forced them into the arms of the desktop makers," Shim says. "That's going away." Shim says the market should see a lot of attractive notebooks, even ultraportables, in the \$1000-to-\$1200 range.

Again, Core 2 Duo notebooks will command top dollar, but you should find a lot of attractively priced notebooks with older Core Duo processors from Intel or with AMD Turion 64 CPUs. And that's good news: In our tests, notebooks based on Core 2 Duo delivered only modest (at best) performance improvements over their similarly configured Core Duo-

based predecessors (see *News and Trends* on page 24). So don't pay a fat premium for a Core 2 Duo-based portable. (But again, make sure not to skimp on RAM or graphics if you're planning a Vista upgrade sometime in the future.)

And what if you could not care less about Vista? Even if you prefer to stick with a familiar operating system (Microsoft says it will be supporting Windows XP for another three years), you probably still want decent performance. "I still think dual core's a good idea, even if you have XP," Endpoint's Kay says, noting that the technology will benefit anyone who multitasks, regardless of OS.

Whatever you buy, do your homework. With so much going on sale, you need to make sure you're getting a real deal. ■

Yardena Arar is a senior editor, Andrew Brandt is a contributing editor, and Amber Bouman is an editorial assistant for PC World. E-mail them at consumerwatch@pcworld.com, privacywatch@pcworld.com, or onyourside@pcworld.com. To read previously published Consumer Watch, Privacy Watch, or On Your Side columns, visit find.pcworld.com/31703, find.pcworld.com/31706, or find.pcworld.com/31709, respectively.

ON YOUR SIDE

Rebate or Warranty: Pick Just One

W I PURCHASED AN EVGA 7900 GT graphics card and had an unpleasant surprise when I began to fill out the rebate coupon. This coupon required that both it and the original UPC sticker off the package be mailed together to EVGA. However, conspicuous under the UPC sticker on the box was the statement, "Warranty VOID if sticker removed."

I called the telephone number listed on the rebate coupon and spoke to a customer service representative as well as a supervisor, and both of them confirmed that if the UPC sticker is removed from the product's box the warranty is void, but also that the UPC sticker is required to get the rebate.

Jay Sherman, Houston

On Your Side responds: We contacted the graphics card manufacturer, EVGA, about this paradox, and a company representative told us that the rebate and the warranty would both be honored as long as the UPC from the box is sent in for the rebate and the UPC on the video card itself remains intact. Apparently, the wording on the rebate was incorrect, and it has since been changed.

In situations such as this one, you'll usually have more success by contacting the originator of the rebate—in this case, the equipment manufacturer—directly, instead of the rebate center, which may not have the ability to alter the offer. However, note that in some cases the originator may be a retailer.

—Amber Bouman

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